

Sow behavior pre-farrowing

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Background

Studies have shown that giving sows straw before farrowing reduce the number of stillborn piglets and duration of farrowing and may improve the sows' maternal abilities. In nature the nest will be ready 6-8 hrs pre-farrowing and she will spend the last 0-4 hrs prior to farrowing resting. The frequency of changes in posture is used as an indicator that the sows have finished their nest building behavior and are mentally ready to farrow.

Objective

This study aimed at investigating if the active period 0-18 hrs before birth of the first piglet was affected by housing type and nesting material.

Materials and Methods

The trial was performed in a Danish sow herd and included 97 multiparous sows. The sows were divided into 4 groups according to number of stillborn piglets in their previous litter. Group 1 consisted of loose housed sows that were given straw on the floor 3 days before expected farrowing. The remaining 3 groups included sows housed in pens, with group 2 given jute sacks, group 3 given 0.5 kg straw on the floor 3 days before expected farrowing, and group 4 given straw in racks 3 days before expected farrowing.

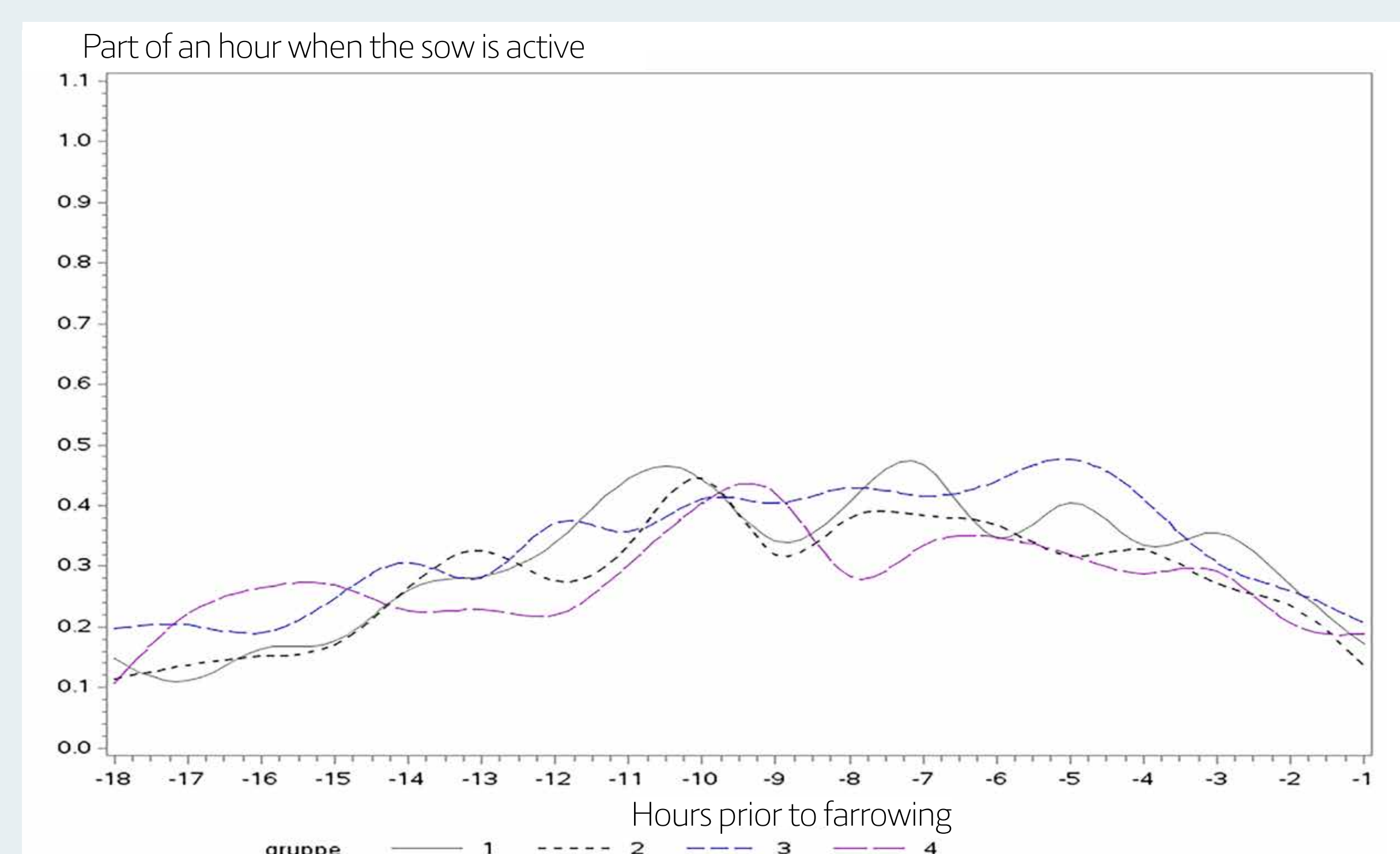


Figure 1: Activity level - hours pre-farrowing

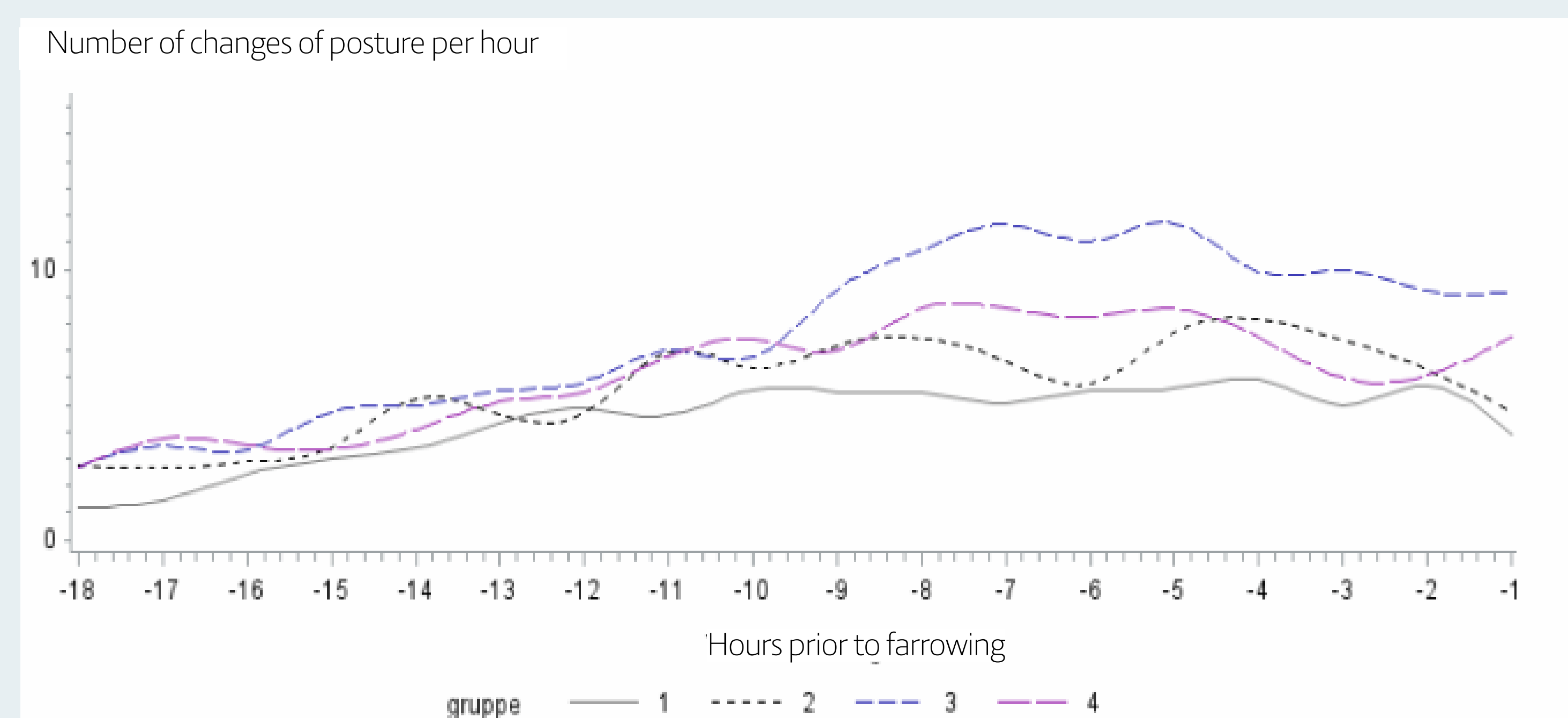
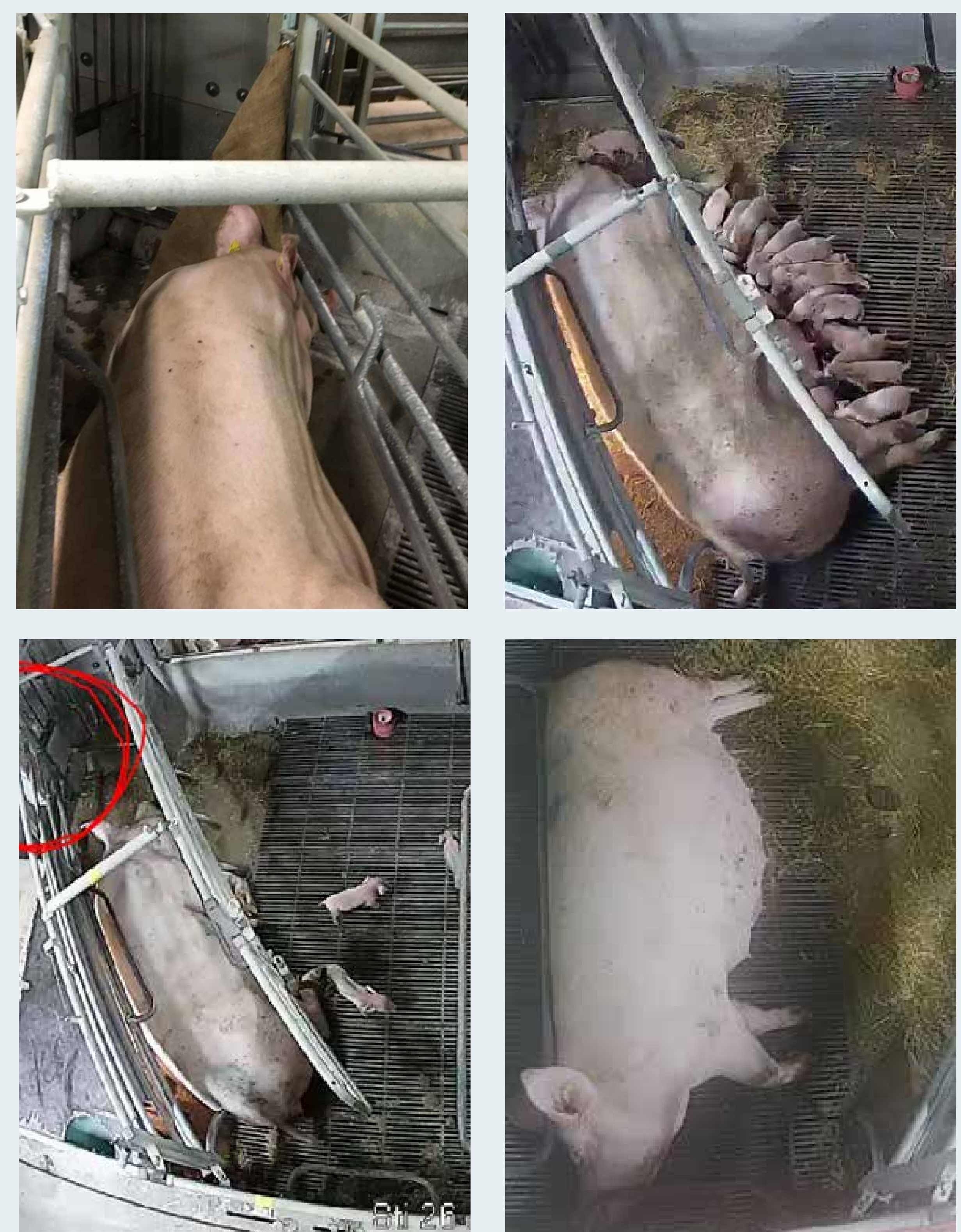


Figure 2: Number of changes of posture per hour

Results

Selected results are presented in Figure 1 showing the activity level of the sows 0-18 hrs prior to farrowing, and in Figure 2 showing the number of times the sows changed postures per hour 0-18 hrs pre-farrowing.



Conclusion

Sows given straw on the floor 3-4 days before expected farrowing changed their position 0-4 hrs before farrowing more frequently than loose housed sows in the farrowing unit. No difference in activity level was found between the groups 0-18 hrs before farrowing. Sows given a jute sack had significantly fewer changes of posture than sows given straw on the floor. The jute sack could be a good alternative to straw on the floor.

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